



Washington State Department of Transportation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 2, 2002

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Former Port of Portland Director To Lead Washington State Ferries

(Seattle, Washington) Transportation Secretary Douglas B. MacDonald today announced the appointment of Michael G. Thorne as the new CEO of Washington State Ferries. Thorne comes to the ferry system from Portland, Oregon where he most recently served for ten years as Executive Director for the Port of Portland.

“Mike Thorne will bring dynamic and proven leadership to creating a bright future for the Washington State Ferries,” MacDonald said. “He has a strong executive track record using innovative and business-based approaches in the public sector. He understands customer service. He understands the maritime business. He has built transportation systems and shown how they fit together. He cares about people that work with him. And both as a senior manager and as a former legislator, he knows the importance of good financial stewardship.”

MacDonald and Thorne together announced their priorities for the ferry system.

“The ferry system must show its commitment to customers with visible and measurable improvements in service and efficiency,” Thorne said. “These steps will also help the ferries move toward a secure financial future that can support communities’ service expectations, bring new investment in the vessels and terminals, and encourage elected officials’ commitment to the system’s future.”

“In all of our discussions,” MacDonald added, “Mike has stressed the importance of the ferries’ integration with our entire transportation system. That promises better links with transit services and car-pools, smoother traffic to and from the terminals, and an exciting future for projects like the multi-modal terminals in Anacortes, and Mukilteo, and Edmonds. We also hope to see higher revenues from concessions and an even stronger future role for the ferries in Washington state tourism.”

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Mike Thorne retired last May after serving since 1991 as Executive Director for the Port of Portland. The Port owns and operates Portland International Airport, Portland Seaport and Marine Terminals, four industrial parks, three general aviation airports. The port has approximately 750 employees and an annual budget of approximately \$850 million. Under Thorne's leadership, Portland became the West Coast's leading auto import site while air traffic grew at the airport and new revenue growth permitted a sixty percent reduction in the level of support for the agency from local property taxes. Thorne also led the program to expand Portland's MAX transit system to the airport, a service now used by over 2,400 riders a day.

From 1972 to 1991, Thorne was elected for five terms to Oregon State Senate from a district including Pendleton, where his family owns and manages a 5000-acre wheat farm. While in the Senate, committees he chaired included Agriculture and Natural Resources, Trade and Economic Development, and Ways and Means. He has a degree in Agriculture Business from Washington State University.

Mike Thorne's appointment culminates a long search process set in place by Secretary MacDonald. Last May, MacDonald asked an eight-person panel to assist in locating and evaluating candidates to fill the ferry system CEO job. Panel members include Tom Green, former Transportation Commission Chair and current Executive Director of Link Transit in Wenatchee; Rick Bender, President, Washington State Labor Council; Robert Distler, Current Chair, Executive Committee of the Ferry Advisory Committee, Chair of the San Juan County Ferry Advisory Committee and a ferry rider; Alice Tawresey, Current Chair of the Ferry Tariff Policy Review Committee, former Transportation Commission Chair and a ferry rider; John Blackman, Owner, Argosy Tours, Seattle; Helga Morgenstern, Assistant Secretary for Administration and Support; John Okamoto, Assistant Secretary for Northwest Washington; and Terry McCarthy, who has served as Acting Director of the ferry system since November 2000.

According to MacDonald, "Even with high expectations, no one guessed how much effort these panelists would volunteer to this process and how much we would benefit from their concern for the future of the ferries. We wish to thank them all for the special public service they have performed."

Panel member Rick Bender describes Thorne as "a straight shooter, approachable, interested in establishing collaborative working relationships with labor and someone with a solid reputation for honoring commitments and agreements."

Panel member John Blackman, with close ties to the maritime industry and a broad background in business and transportation issues, gives Thorne high marks for his "astute business and management skills and his sophisticated awareness and understanding of the public and political skills needed to lead the ferry system."

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Mike Thorne will begin his duties at the ferry system on January 7. He and his wife, Jill, will settle in Seattle. His annual salary is \$130,000. Thorne is a director of two publicly-held corporations, Willamette Industries and StanCorp Financial, positions he will continue to hold by serving on his own time and adhering to established ethical guidelines for avoiding conflict-of-interest with his public responsibilities.

Washington State Ferries is the largest ferry system in the United States. Last year, the ferry system carried 26 million passengers and 11 million cars. WSF operates 29 vessels on ten routes with twenty terminals. Currently, there are 1800 full and part-time employees working for the ferry system.

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